

Tape 27

Side A, 1/16 - 1/8

17 OCT 1979

cc: DDNFA

MEMORANDUM FOR: National Intelligence Officer for Latin America

FROM: D C I

SUBJECT: SALVADOR JUNTA


There is very great interest downtown as to the political complexion of the proposed members of the Salvadoran junta. As fast as information on their background and political coloration becomes available, shoot it into

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☐ or elsewhere.

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PASSED AT MORNING
MEETING, 17 OCT.



Carter's advisers split on nature of troops

By James McCartney
Inquirer Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Several of the "wise men" who counseled President Carter during the uproar over Soviet forces in Cuba concluded that it was virtually impossible to prove that those troops constituted a "combat" unit, it has been learned.

The result was that the President was unable to achieve one of his major goals in setting up the 15-member "wise men" group to discredit Soviet contentions that the unit in Cuba was used only for training.

In effect, several members of the group, after being exposed to all top-secret intelligence data, refused to support the President on the most basic issue in the case — whether the brigade involved was, in fact, a "combat" brigade.

"There was no disagreement among the 'wise men' about the central facts — that there were tanks and guns and missiles, and that they (the Soviet troops) were equipped and structured so that they could be used for combat," said one source intimately familiar with all of the details.

"However, several of them — I don't want to say exactly how many — questioned whether we could be totally sure it could be characterized as a combat unit.

"It was a question of language." By the time the "wise men" group was formed, however, the language in U.S. charges already had become the central issue in the dispute.

The group, headed by Washington lawyer and former secretary of defense Clark Clifford, was formed in mid-September. The administration early in September had publicly described the unit as a "combat brigade" and had made its character-

ization the central issue of negotiations with the Soviets.

Secretary of State Cyrus Vance emphasized that point at a news conference Sept. 5, when he first announced that the United States considered the presence of the Soviet brigade in Cuba to be "a very serious matter", and would not accept "the status quo."

"It is the combat nature of the unit which is a matter of serious concern to us," he said. Two days later, President Carter said flatly: "We have concluded ... that a Soviet combat unit is currently stationed in Cuba."

The Soviet Communist Party newspaper, Pravda, rejected the combat-brigade charge as "totally groundless" in a front-page editorial Sept. 10.

The paper said a Soviet training unit had been based in Cuba since just after the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, and that "neither the number nor the function of the Soviet personnel have changed throughout all these years."

In his speech to the nation Monday about the Cuban brigade, President Carter acknowledged that the Soviets would not admit the unit was a combat force.

He did not flatly assert that it was, but said that "we have persuasive evidence that there is a combat brigade."

A top-level White House official said a few days before the President's speech that one of the administration's major objectives in forming the council of "wise men" was to try to convince the public, through credible former government officials, that the Soviets were not telling the truth on the "combat" issue.

The "wise men" included former intelligence and military officials who served the nation during the last 30 years.